BUTTERFLIES IN LANZAROTE — APRIL 1988 - APRIL 1989

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HAVING been invited for the second year running to share a holiday with some friends at their time-share in Lanzarote I was particularly looking forward to the opportunity to check on the butterfly sightings I had recorded in our 1988 visit. Both visits were made in the same two-week period — the last two weeks of April. In 1988, the early part of the year had seen quite a lot of rain on the island and our friends, with five or six years of visiting, were saying that they had never seen so much green vegetation and flowers. By the time of our visit, however, the weather was more typical — generally hot and sunny, but steady winds not uncommon in exposed areas.

In 1988, during the 14-day visit, I noted eight species of butterfly. The first day (15th April) after our arrival was, perhaps, the windiest of the visit. A solitary *Maniola jurtina* Linn. was noted around the geranium and other flowers of the time-share complex at Costa Teguise and during a short walk up the coast beyond the Beach Club a *Vanessa cardui* Linn. and an occasional *Colias croceus* Geoff. were being blown over the rather sparse vegetation and dwarf flowers amongst the lava rocks. They looked in good condition and, being on the east coast, I have since wondered whether they might have come across the 80 or so miles of sea separating the island from Morocco in Africa.

During the next fourteen days we visited various parts of the island. Most days the weather was warm and sunny and in driving about we were struck, mentally and physically, by the large numbers of *C. croceus* and *V. cardui*. Many were seen dead on the road or hit with a splat on the windscreen of our car. Stricken victims were no doubt soon disposed of by the large population of lizards and on one occasion a swallow swooped in front of me and nabbed a *C. croceus* just as I was noting it flying across the road.

Our friends, aware of my interest in butterflies, reported that they had earlier seen a "smallish white butterfly with greenish underside". This sounds like *Elphinstonia charlonia* Donzel — but I never saw any myself. The only white butterfly I saw was rapidly exploring flowering shrubs at a neighbouring complex. It did not settle for long at any time and I had neither the means nor the audacity to try and catch it under those conditions — but I am pretty sure it was *Pieris brassicae cheiranthi* Hbn.

As time went on the numbers of *C. croceus* and *V. cardui* seemed to increase day by day. By the 20th - 24th they were probably at a peak. Roadside verges usually with more luxuriant vegetation than farther in the fields seemed to be particular flying areas. For example, on 21st April on the road from Teguise to Yaiza we noted dozens or more of these two species.

Less common, but still quite numerous, was *Lycaena phlaeas* Linn. in similar territory. And, in perhaps more restricted areas, there were a number of *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. A dried stream bed with carpets of dwarf flowers at the lower reaches of the Guanapay volcano near Teguise in the centre of the island was alive with *V. cardui, P. icarus* and also the occasional *Vanessa virginiensis* Drury and *L. phlaeas.*

Undoubtedly, the largest numbers of *P. icarus* were seen at Mirador del Rio — a lofty outlook point at the top of the cliffs in the north-west corner of the island. A hot day there (20th April) brought out thousands (calculated on numbers in a few random metre-squares) — predominantly males but also many females. Curiously, I have no record of seeing any mating.

By 28th April however, whether because of a slight deterioration in the weather (it had definitely been more windy for a day or two), or perhaps because of an actual decline in population, the number of butterflies about had fallen dramatically. On a drive south-west from Teguise along the road we saw only an occasional *C. croceus* or *V. cardui* where ten days earlier they had been in their dozens.

Perhaps that was the limit of the butterfly season in Lanzarote and, certainly, my impression from this first visit was that April was a good month to be there. But perhaps my season had been exceptional — for D.F. Owen writing on a visit even earlier that year (*Ent. Rec.* **100**: 259-260) has concluded that "it is likely that [on Lanzarote] all butterflies are chiefly active in February and March".

All the more reason for my eager anticipation of the 1989 visit and the chance to check my sightings. I had heard that the 1989 season had also begun with more than usual early rains and I was confident that again there would be plenty of vegetation about and that butterfly numbers would be good.

The vegetation was there alright but there had been prolonged high winds and often relatively cool weather. A gully (barranco) no doubt normally quite dried up by this time of the year still had some pools of rather stagnant water (one with a good population of *Anopheles* larvae), but there were very few butterflies about and for the first week of our stay the only species seen in any numbers was *E. c. charlonia.*

According to Higgins and Riley (1969) *:E. c. charlonia* is normally found around 2000 feet but I was finding it at many locations even down to sea level. A fellow holiday maker to whom I had explained that the butterfly normally flew at 2000 feet asked if it was the high winds that were bringing them down. I agreed that it might be so. However, it was not until the subject came up again the next day that I realised that his understanding of flying at 2000 feet was a sort of butterfly "layer" 2000 feet up in the air!

All the same, although *E.c. charlonia* was quite widespread in small numbers it certainly was much more numerous at height. For example, 20th

April, at the top of a long extinct and eroded volcano (Bermeja, 157 metres) on the nearby island of Graciosa I noted it in dozens. The same day, I could record only a single *C. croceus* and a single *V. virginiensis*.

What a contrast between the years! If I had written this in 1988 I would have been quite sure that mid to end April was the best time to see butterflies in Lanzarote — good variety and large numbers in many locations. But in 1989 I would be saying that Lanzarote had a very localised butterfly population with little to be seen unless one knew the "right places to go".

What is the true situation? Is Feb/March the best time or is it late April or perhaps even later? Others of the Canary Islands have been reported on in the *Record* from time to time but we have had little information so far on Lanzarote.

The breeding site of *Anthicus bifasciatus* (Rossi) (Col.: Anthicidae) at Broadway, Worcestershire.

In 1990 (*Entomologist mon. Mag.* **126**: 27-32; *Col. Newsletter* **39**: 7-8) I referred to *Anthicus bifasciatus* (Rossi) in the Broadway area of Worcestershire, although in the former publication I was unable to provide evidence of breeding.

In the spring of 1990 a large quantity of cow dung and stable bedding was spread in a paddock at Broadway (SP04). In the following hot summer decomposition was negligible, the compacted bedding desiccated, and was only really damp at contact with the ground.

A substantial population of *A. bifasciatus* built up and teneral specimens were located in September 1990. Apart from what has just been outlined the following key considerations hallmark the beetle fauna:

(a) the presence of *Astenus pulchellus* (Heer) (not yet noted by the writer in compost)
(b) the dominance of *Mycetaea hirta* (Msh.)
(c) the absence of *Anthicus floralis* (L.) (frequently encountered in compost).— P.F. WHITEHEAD, Moor Leys, Little Comberton, Pershore, Worcestershire WR10 3EP.

Observations on Coleoptera in the diet of two bird species in Worcestershire.

It is not easy to obtain exact information on the diet of Sand Martins by examination of faecal sacs of nestlings, because they are frequently dropped by parent birds into water beneath the nesting sites. On 5.9.1990 at Beckford, Worcestershire, I released two such sacs from spiders' webs at a nest opening. They contained, in addition to disarticulated fragments of flies and wasps (including chalcids), fragments of the following beetles: